

The Mask and the Play as Conceptual Components of M. Frisch's Prose

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v7i6.2374>

APA Citation: Navasardyan, S. (2025). The Mask and the Play as Conceptual Components of M. Frisch's Prose. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*. 7(6).170-190. <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v7i6.2374>

Received:

02/09/2025

Accepted:

26/10/2025

Keywords:

*M. Frisch's
prose, mask,
artistic play,
search for
identity,
freedom of
choice.*

Abstract

The article explores the existentialist problem of duality and the search for one's own identity in the prose of the Swiss writer Max Frisch. According to M. Frisch, a man should "define himself" in such a way that he can accept his ego, should find his role and his place in society according to his subjective view, even if it goes against the generally accepted norms and principles. "Mask" and artistic "role-playing", as the main concepts of the writer's prose, are "tools" and conductors of the author's ideas. The author emphasizes the possibility and even the necessity of freedom of choice, which is achieved through "changing roles" and "changing masks". Diary entries, which are of exceptional importance in the writer's work, in the analyzed novels depart from the genre specificity, characteristic of both personal and literary diaries, and become part of the general "game" of the narrative. It is the diary "memories" that gives the author the opportunity for a sharp and unexpected change of different angles and perspectives. Reality in M. Frisch's novels is so skillfully intertwined with virtuality that it is difficult to find the line where the author's sincere monologue with himself ends and the author's play of imagination begins.

The Mask and the Play as Conceptual Components of M. Frisch's Prose

The works, authored by the Swiss writer and playwright Max Frisch are distinguished by a variety of stylistic devices, which cannot be said about the subject matter of his prose, which in almost all cases focuses on a dramatic personality hiding behind a "mask". Different variations of this theme are constructed differently by the author in his novels and stories, but in the ideological and substantive aspects, the following main parallel lines are always distinguished: the first is dissatisfaction with oneself and others; the second is playing up the identity of one's own ego, the purpose of which is an attempt to "adapt" one's own "I" to the surrounding world; the egocentricity of the dramatic "I", usually explained by the rejection of everything around, or an inadequate perception of one's desired identity; dissatisfaction with the routine of life and the role that one's environment "forces" one to play.

All of the above-mentioned is especially clearly reflected in the novels "Stiller", "Homo Faber", "I Will Call Myself Gantenbein" and in the story "Montauk". In their "classical" form,

these thematic parallels first appeared in the novel “Stiller”. Although the compositional solutions, just like the dramaturgy of the aforementioned prose works, sometimes acquire unexpected angles and are full of twists and turns, the main character seems to move from one work to another, “stably” preserving his characteristic fundamental features and unique worldview. The same role-playing game with the use of masks, which he “tries on” in each individual case in accordance with the logic of the development of the plot line.

The ideological basis of the novel “Stiller” is the philosophy of existentialism, which from that moment on becomes the “cornerstone” of all the work of Max Frisch. The author himself deliberately emphasizes this, preceding the novel with quotes from the works of Søren Kierkegaard, the “father” of existential philosophy. The existentialist idea that a person is “thrown” into the world and must find his own goal, his own “I”, fits all the main characters of his novels perfectly. According to M. Frisch, a person must “define himself” in such a way that he can accept his ego. He needs to find the truth that is applicable to his subjective view, and it does not matter if it contradicts the “generally accepted” norms and principles. The author puts the possibility and even the necessity of “freedom of choice” at the forefront, which is also one of the fundamental principles of the philosophy of existentialism. Kierkegaard’s ideas, cited by the author as a “prologue”, predetermine the problem of Stiller’s search for his own identity: the main character admits that “it is difficult to choose oneself”, since in this choice “absolute isolation” excludes any possibility of “becoming something else” (Frisch, 1991a, p. 91).

The main character of the novel, Anatol Ludwig Stiller, also the first-person narrator, tries to “free himself” from the role that society has “defined” for him, the one it wants to see him in. He is a sculptor from Zurich (an allusion to himself: at a certain point in time, M. Frisch worked as an architect, his first specialty). The search for another, completely different identity becomes his “idée fixe”, the main meaning of life. The degree of importance of such a reincarnation, a new “mask”, is expressed in the novel by the hero’s desire to change even his national identity, and therefore his national mentality, his ideological approaches to various issues. Hoping to start a new life, Stiller disappears from his hometown and goes to America, intending to live a new, different life there under the name Jim White. The author’s choice of this name clearly indicates the desire of the main character of the novel to start life from a “clean slate” (white – White). He tries to use every opportunity to build something new, to get rid of memories of personal failures, dramatic life circumstances, to burn bridges behind him and become a “defector”.

This work by M. Frisch marked a new form of novelistic narration: the memories of the main character, or stories directly or indirectly touching on the main narrative, are constantly “wedged” into the multi-layered structure of the artistic text. It is this technique of alternating the main narrative and “inserted” stories, temporal and spatial perspectives (present and past, prison cell and the outside world) that helps the author, according to the principle of *solitaire*, step by step to reveal more and more new layers of common deep content, gradually revealing the connection between different links of one chain. Stiller explains the problem of his failed self-realization in his homeland, Switzerland, by the fact that in the everyday routine reality, society has defined and assigned a role to him and others like him, which keeps a person within a narrow and strict framework, from which it is impossible to escape. Stiller tries to break with this past both physically and psychologically. To do this, he tries himself in completely different spheres, with a completely “different face”. That is, the path to “saving” his human “I” for him lies through a complete rejection of his own personality, even his national identity and the national mentality associated with it. Stiller is most afraid of a repetition of routine everyday life.

But even in the “new image” of Jim White, he did not succeed in America: Stiller is completely isolated not only from his environment, but also from his own ego. Ultimately, he cannot find a use for himself here either; his attempt to create a new life fails. When Stiller again wants to “change his environment” and return to Switzerland, he is unexpectedly arrested at the border and ends up in a Zurich prison. He later learns that a fellow traveler has identified Jim White as the Swiss sculptor Stiller, who disappeared without a trace six years ago and is suspected of being an intermediary in the assassination attempt. White tries to distance himself from this accusation, but even his lawyer, who wants to break his stubbornness, does not believe him. He does not want to admit that his passport is fake and that he is, in fact, Stiller. In this game of “role reversal” M. Frisch constantly has an element of detective fiction. However, even in this case, the author tries to remain original: as a rule, the basis of his detective narrative is a philosophical and psychological factor.

The diary that Stiller begins to keep in prison reveals his deep psychological problems as a free and creative person. These entries clearly show the idea that a person is not only a slave to the surrounding social environment, but he is also a slave to his own fate and himself.

Stiller continues to invent stories for himself as a “protective buffer”, not losing hope that he will still be able to create a second life for himself that he can enjoy. However, after returning to his homeland and during his arrest, these hopes seemed to him only self-deception, “lost illusions”. The legal decision required Jim White to admit his authenticity, even though he had subjectively changed quite a bit.

The diary entries made in the Zurich remand prison “layer by layer” reveal the true background of the disappearance of the long-lost Stiller. M. Frisch uses different angles and perspectives, different spatio-temporal forms, different narratives, where reality is intertwined with virtuality: thanks to this, the question of the true identity of the protagonist remains in an “uncertain” state until the very end of the novel.

The goals, thoughts and actions of Stiller, like those of other main characters in M. Frisch’s novels and stories, are directly connected with the main female characters. Without this connection or outside this connection, it is very difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to understand the course of thoughts and actions of the main character. In the novel under study, Stiller perceives the material independence of his wife Yulika and her success in work as an “encroachment” against his male dignity: as a sculptor, he earns incomparably less than his wife, and this explains her “free disposition”.

Having “lost” his old face, he cannot find a new one. Stiller is completely confused in this game with “masks”, which he himself initiated. Thus, he finally drove himself into a dead end in the search for his own identity. Already in the “role” of Jim White, he criticizes Stiller — that is, his “former” self — for his inappropriate attitude towards his wife, for ignoring the seriousness and danger of her illness, which later led to her death. Even during the interrogation in court, Yulika recognized the identity of her husband, she did not want to accept his “game”, just as she did not want to test the seriousness of his “new” feelings for a second time.

The diary entries of M. Frisch himself, which he very skillfully uses in the general structure of the novel — both in its narrative part and in Stiller’s “prison diaries” — not only enhance the perception of the realism of what is happening, but also reveal the causal connections of his current situation with the life vicissitudes of past years. Along with the “change of masks”, when the author changes the narrator on whose behalf the story is told (at first it is Stiller, then Jim White, sometimes the author of the novel “takes over” the role of the narrator), the angles of approach to the same problems also very often change.

The novel “Stiller” is the first major work that raises existential problems of the search for identity, paths and forms of self-realization. Max Frisch admitted that he wrote not to save humanity, but to save himself (Hage, 2011, p. 34). The novel, published in 1954, marked M. Frisch’s breakthrough as a novelist.

The theme of fate and rebellion against it continues in almost all of M. Frisch’s subsequent novels. It is expressed most vividly in the novel “Homo Faber”, where the structure of the work, the plotline, and the general ideological content are subordinated to this problem. The two most important sources of the novel are:

- impressions from various trips
- autobiographical materials (mostly taken from personal diary entries).

In terms of literary sources that directly or indirectly influenced the plot of the novel, the numerous mentions and references to the theme of Oedipus deserve attention. The material of Sophocles' tragedies, repeatedly used in various works of world literature, is presented here through the prism of a modern, pragmatic technocratic hero.

Autobiographical elements are more often used when "introducing" elements of realism, plausibility of the narrative, or when outlining the characters of certain characters. First of all, they are found in the characterization of the heroine of the novel — Hannah. The origins of the story associated with her go back to the 1930s. This is primarily the connection with the "Jewish bride", about whom M. Frisch writes, "The name of the Jewish bride from Berlin <...> was in fact not Hannah, but Käthe. She was my close friend. We did not live together, but we met every day. She was a student. She wanted to have a child, and this frightened me. As an unestablished writer, a newcomer to this profession, I was not ready for this (Hage, 2011, p. 41). At that time, I was ready to get married, if only she could stay in Switzerland (there were signs everywhere: "Jews are not accepted for work"). We went to the Civil Registration Office in Zurich, but she rejected my "love" and refused to become my wife" (Knapp & Knapp, 1983, p. 48). M. Frisch, as a rule, does not talk about the past of his characters and only certain fragments of past years emerge depending on the context: their functionality is associated either with the introduction of specifics, details that answer the question of why a given character in a given situation or at a given period of his life decides to take such a step, or it helps to reveal the essence of the prism through which he sees and evaluates the world around him, as well as his place and his role in a given society.

Autobiographical material performs approximately the same function in M. Frisch. The author himself emphasizes the following here. "My biography is such that I have a Christian upbringing, but I am an unbeliever: I feel guilty, but I do not know what my sin is" (**Frisch, 1950, p. 93**).

The key part of the plot is the author's fiction, for the sake of which M. Frisch changed the structure of the entire novel. "Homo Faber" is divided into two parts, the first of which has three storylines, during the development of which the main events occur:

1. Faber's journey from New York to Guatemala and back to New York.
2. The journey from New York to Le Havre.
3. The journey from Le Havre to Athens.

The second part of the novel can be divided into two stages.

1. Faber's second trip to New York, then to Caracas, Cuba, and finally back to Athens.

2. His appearance at the hospital in Athens.

The first part of the novel begins with Walter Faber's report on a planned trip from New York airport to Guatemala in March, and already in this initial part of the novel we also learn that Faber has abandoned his boring mistress Ivy, whom he "fundamentally" does not want to marry.

Thus, from the very first lines of the work, it becomes clear that it combines two different sides of the novel's narrative: on the one hand, a narrative form reminiscent of a report, a protocol; on the other, a novelistic plot describing the personal relationships of the main characters.

Also, from the beginning of the novel, the division of actions and events associated with the main character into "ordinary" and "unusual, unplanned" becomes obvious. For example, he notes that "the plane is, as always, at altitude," and that "the engines are working normally" (Frisch, 1991b, p. 9). However, something "unplanned and unusual" follows: during a transit stop in Houston, Faber loses consciousness. In the mirror, his face "appears terrible, like a corpse" (Frisch, 1991b, p. 11). "Suddenly" Faber wants to "stop" his flight; he has a bad feeling; he wants the plane to continue flying without him (Frisch, 1991b, p. 13), but when the stewardess leads him to the plane, he obediently follows her. On the plane, he strikes up a conversation with a passenger sitting next to him and "unexpectedly" learns that the man, Herbert Henke, is the brother of his childhood friend Joachim Henke.

In this part of the plot, the heartfelt conversation and warm memories are again followed by a kind of "report" with a corresponding change in the tone of the narrative. Pleasant and unpleasant "surprises" follow one another. Moreover, one such surprise threatens to turn into a dramatic accident: when the plane's second engine "suddenly" fails, it leads to an emergency landing in the Tamaulipas desert. Faber spends four "unplanned" days here (26. 3–29. 3).

At this point in the report, he makes his first decisive remark. "I do not believe in luck or fate, and as a technical person, I'm used to looking at everything through the prism of probability theory. What does fate mean? I admit that if it hadn't been for the forced landing in the Tamaulipas desert, everything would have turned out differently. I wouldn't have known this young Henke; I might never have heard of Hannah again, and I might never have known to this day that I was a father... Maybe Zabeth would still be alive" (Frisch, 1991b, p. 22). What is important and decisive here is not Faber's reasoning (after all, the meeting with Herbert had nothing to do with Zabeth and the story associated with it), but rather the fact that Faber is at the intersection of three dimensions of time: past, present, and future. The question "What will happen?" loses its weight in relation to the question "How is the action developing now?"

The culmination of the first stage of the action is the death of Joachim Henke: he hangs himself.

The spatial dimension in the novel corresponds to the description of different temporal dimensions: in this respect, the novel often shows a tendency to repetition. Faber moves from Guatemala to Caracas and stays there for some time, a place where we later see Faber for the second time. This time he has to stay there for a long time because of a stomach ailment, and during this time he writes the first part of his report. New York, where Faber stays for only a day, is a “crossroads” of the action locations and, at the same time, the starting point of the further fatal journey. The first stage of the first part of the action ends with the separation from Ivy.

As already mentioned, the second plot line is Faber's journey to Le Havre. It is then that he learns about his paternity. But he is not ready for this new “role” and wants to “ward it off” from himself in every possible way. Faber again calls the fact that he meets his own daughter on the same ship “a mere coincidence”. (“If I had not mended the razor, I would never have met Zabeth”) (Frisch, 1991b, p. 69). He tries in every possible way to banish from his consciousness the concepts of “fate” and “destiny”.

This stage of the development of the action plays an intermediate role in the novel: it has mainly a preparatory significance for the sequence of events. The tension, as well as the reader's attention, become increasingly concentrated on the protagonist's connection with Zabeth. Faber's next thoughts, “I didn't know about all this yet” seem to prepare the further dramatic development of the novel: “I ruined my child's life and cannot restore it” (Frisch, 1991b, p. 69). In this part of the novel, Walter Faber takes a defensive position; he tries to absolve himself of any sin by justifying himself: “If I had named Joachim Henke then, everything would have been clear... and everything would have turned out differently” (Frisch, 1991b, p. 185). Faber's proposal of marriage to Zabeth came to mind “spontaneously”, and with it the following thought: “My life is in her hands” (Frisch, 1991b, p. 95), a thought that creates an irreversibly dramatic sequence of events that turn out to be fatal for both of them. The third stage of the first part clearly represents the culmination of the novel. The focus is on the love relationship between father and daughter. The central place in this part of the novel is occupied by the death of Zabeth: for Faber, this tragedy becomes a “point of no return”.

Trying to justify and console himself, Faber “puts on” the “mask” of an innocent pragmatist: he tries “not to see” the truth and instead silently calculates, “She can only be Joachim's child” (Frisch, 1991b, p. 120).

M. Frisch uses repetitions of plot lines and situations in order to show the transformation that occurs in the life and worldview of the main character. Leaving for the second time for

New York, then for Caracas and Guatemala, Faber seems to want to “bring back the past” (Frisch, 1991b, p. 164). Here he finds Herbert abandoned and hopeless, with no plans for the future.

In Caracas, Faber had to spend several days in a hotel because of severe pain from a stomach ulcer. He asks for a mirror and studies the changes on his face: an obvious repetition of the scene from the first part: the face reflected in the mirror is marked by the same pallor and “lifelessness” as after losing consciousness in Houston.

Faber spends July in Cuba, without communicating with anyone, and for the first time enjoys an unknown joy of life. Changes occur in his consciousness. “This is my decision to live differently” (Frisch, 1991b, p. 175). This short fragment of the novel has a conceptually important meaning, connected with the philosophical and psychological perception of the protagonist (as well as the author of the novel) of the concept of freedom. The first and most fundamental goal of the “change of roles”, “change of masks” for the main characters of M. Frisch’s novels in general, and this novel in particular, is the acquisition of freedom in their understanding of this word: unrecognizability in the surrounding society, the absence of any conventions, the ability to be yourself, the ability to evaluate “natural” life, your own identification in this “natural space” — all this allows Faber to forget about the need for “role-playing”, the need for a constant change of “masks” for a certain period of his life.

Faber wants to enjoy the “smell of the grass”, “listen to the sound of the water” ... But the most frequently repeated and fundamentally entrenched “refrain” in his work is the words “hold fast to the light”, the joys of life in general, and here and now — in particular (Frisch, 1991b, p. 192). And with the same constancy, this is immediately contrasted with a reminder of the “fading” of life: that is, the thoughts of the protagonist can be formulated in the following well-known vein: remember death and therefore value every minute of life, life “in the light”. He never forgets for a minute about his inalienable right to freedom, which in his case is equivalent to the meaning of the right to life. Freedom is the most precious thing he has in life, and therefore an encroachment on his freedom for him means an encroachment on his life.

The conceptual, core role of the concept of freedom is already evidenced by the epigraph to the first novel by M. Frisch – “Stiller”, taken from the works of Kierkegaard: “When the passion for freedom awakens in him, he chooses himself” (Frisch, 1991a, p. 9). These words could just as successfully be used as an epigraph to any of the novels of the Swiss author, since the search for their own freedom of his protagonists, as the central problem of all these works, is directly connected with the search for their own identity. The days spent in Cuba make him look differently at the world around him, at himself, his perception of good and evil, his pragmatic, “technically verified” attitude toward the actions of people, to various

phenomena of his everyday life. He suddenly hates the technogenic way of life in America and begins to value “real” life. “I praise life” (Frisch, 1991b, p. 171). And yet Faber once again declares that he “wish(s) that it (life – S. N.) had never existed” (Frisch, 1991b, p. 195). An obvious allusion to the Oedipus motif.

The tragedy of Walter Faber's life is that, on the one hand, he does not accept “fatal” coincidences, does not accept anything irrational, scientifically unverified and unsubstantiated: all this is just a chimera for him; he believes that he has become a victim of countless coincidences.

After Faber's death, by analogy with Oedipus, his “hesitations” and “presentiments” turn into a “static” feeling of guilt in everything that happened. But at the same time, he found Hannah's words incomprehensible, that “this was not an accidental mistake at all, but a mistake that is very akin to him (Faber — S.N.), just like his profession, like his own life” (Frisch, 1991b, p. 179).

Faber, who does not attach importance to everything that cannot be calculated, explained by theories, laws, science, who does not recognize love, religion, art, who does not want to accept them or give them a “scientific” explanation, is now forced to agree that his technocratic way of thinking and worldview is not enough to avoid human sins and fatal coincidences.

As a result of a complex and intricate chronotope, the author unfolds the narration in such a way that Hannah, who embodied Faber's past, becomes a character of the present in the last part of the third stage. The author seems to create a complex knot of time layers in order to hide in this “web” the guilt for his “knowledge or ignorance.” The disruption of the linearity of the narrative, the “confusion” in the protagonist's thoughts often turns out to be a convenient game, helping him to swap cause-and-effect relationships at the right moment to direct them in the direction he needs.

The revelation of Zabeth's identity, the loss of his daughter and the meeting with Hannah finally confirm the idea of an unconquered past, the inevitability of fate. Along with all the tragedy generated by his relationship with his daughter, Faber admits to himself in his soul that Zabeth managed to show him the world from a different side, to help him “reveal” his second “I”, to help in the search for his own identity. Thanks to Zabeth, Walter Faber gets to know the world in its sensory and spiritual richness, the multicolored colors.

The fourth and fifth stages of the second part of the narrative cover the events between Zabeth's death and Faber's transfer to a hospital in Athens. Faber's days, as follows from numerous hints, are also numbered (“My time is up” (Frisch, 1991b, p. 156)).

Thus, the main philosophical idea of the novel, as well as the tragedy of its main character, lies in the initially mistaken belief that modern technology allows people to control all aspects of their lives — both social and personal.

All the events of the novel are opposed to this idea. Faber's desire to overcome the past, to change his "role" in this life, without losing the conviction that the world is absolutely material, that everything in it can be calculated, verified, subordinated to cold reason, the desire to scientifically substantiate every event that happens to him and around him, fails. The freedom to choose a life path, freedom in personal life, freedom of views on fundamental issues are called into question. The problem of his own guilt, the problem of failed searches for self-identification, the problem of conflict with himself remain unresolved for Walter Faber to the end. Incompleteness and uncertainty are the main characteristic features of M. Frisch's novels and stories. Based on Brecht's judgment that a writer should not give "ready-made" answers to the problems raised, his main task is to see these problems, find their roots and comprehensively present them in artistic form. That is, in a figurative sense, to be a "diagnostic doctor", but not an "attending doctor".

This principle of uncertainty in almost all novels is achieved not only by a permanent change of masks and roles, but also by a change of narrator: the author often takes the "reins" of the narrative into his own hands, but just as often hands them over to the main character, and sometimes to the third-person narrator.

Such transitions are especially clear in M. Frisch's next novel, "I Will Call Myself Gantenbein" (1964), where this technique is conditioned by the plot of the work itself. The novel is woven from separate "patchwork" stories, and a certain part of it is more like a "puzzle", which, moreover, can be "assembled" in different ways — sometimes "at the discretion" of the author, sometimes — at the "desire" of the reader. A technique that is in many ways similar to that used by J. Cortazar in his novel "Hopscotch" (by the way, both of these works were published within a few months of each other). But if J. Cortazar, when arranging chapters, changing their places, has the possibility of their "different" reading, then for M. Frisch this "different" reading becomes possible due to the change in the role of the main character or characters of the second, third plan. Along with this, as we will see below, the main character is not limited to just changing the role, but goes further: in the same role he begins to change "masks". The narrator of the novel, as noted above, changes alternately: first it is Enderlin, then it is Gantenbein, and still later the hero passes the "baton" of the narrative to his "opponent" — František Svoboda. However, none of the lines of fate of the named characters ever becomes known to us; the author often presents only the visible part of the "iceberg", that is, the socially visible part of the life of his heroes, and the rest, which is hidden

“below”, he leaves for the reader to “think up”. Including the reader in this role-playing game, M. Frisch gives him the opportunity not only to approach the reading process creatively, but also to “verify” his own “I” — through his vision of this or that problem, and in a broad sense — his vision of the world. Unlike the hero of the previous novel, Faber, the protagonist of this work, Enderlin, decides to change his ego at the very beginning of the novel. Having almost run over a group of schoolchildren with his car, he, having miraculously avoided a terrible catastrophe, sits motionless behind the wheel and an idea comes to his mind – to change his life dramatically (Frisch, 1991b, p. 212).

M. Frisch very successfully finds a compositional link that allows his main character to “reasonably” change his ego: as a result of the aforementioned accident, Enderlin was threatened with loss of sight. However, long-term treatment helped him to regain his sight. But Enderlin wants to keep the fact of his restored sight a secret, considering it an excellent “hook” for starting a new life, under a new name and in a new status (Frisch, 1991b, p. 213).

This “experiment” gives the freedom so desired by Enderlin/Gantenbein, when he is freed from all possible obligations, does not bear any responsibility, is free to do what he likes and what he wants. The author’s idea runs through the ideological content of this novel like a red thread: when his hero puts on a “mask”, the rest of the people who surround him, with whom he communicates more often, on the contrary, take off their “masks” in front of the “blind”, and Gantenbein can already see them in a “natural”, undisguised form: real faces, real relationships. A curious situation is created: in the status of “blind” Gantenbein sees more and “deeper” than when he was “sighted”. Life has become more interesting, less monotonous, and monotony and a predictable line of life for the author of the work, as well as for his heroes, are equivalent to death. And therefore, in order to avoid death or suicide, the main characters of his novels are ready to go to any, even very vague or adventurous, changes in their lives. Felix Enderlin, a famous doctor of philosophy, who was invited to Harvard to give lectures, suddenly decides to refuse the invitation and intends to change his life radically. He wants to change not only his status in public life, but also his name, his appearance, and wants to take on the “role” of a blind man. The fragments of the novel are presented in psychologically great detail and convincingly when the hero — now under the name of Gantenbein — plays the “role” of a blind man for the first time in the relevant department of the city hall in order to receive the document “due to him by law” certifying that he is indeed blind; he is also entitled to a cane and blind man’s glasses (Frisch, 1991b, p. 219). He carefully prepares for the performance of this “role” in advance: not to confuse anything, not to give away his “sight”. Having acquired all this, he already feels confident in society in this capacity. Now he has a unique opportunity to see in those around him, and first of all in his immediate circle, what is hidden from

“outsiders” eyes. His glasses serve him as a kind of “X-ray” apparatus, allowing him to look into the “inner essence” of people close to him. The author indirectly points out that at the same time this is “convenient” for people who communicate with Gantenbein: they can easily do without the “masks” they are accustomed to; for example, there is no need to depict a “duty” smile on his face. In terms of perceiving words, emotions, facial expressions and gestures, Gantenbein, according to his “role”, has only one option — hearing. He is also “freed” from the need to share his opinions on events in the modern world, since, “naturally,” he does not watch TV or read newspapers.

Why does Felix Enderlin choose this not at all easy “role,” when it is impossible to take off the “mask” 24 hours a day? When you must constantly be in extreme tension so as not to “give away” yourself with a word, a movement, or any other reaction to what is happening around you. On the other hand, the novel initially “builds” a circle of problems, beyond which the main character wants to break out at any cost.

This is, first of all, the invariably repeating routine of everyday life: a well-known “script” of everyday events, “feigned” politeness not only in relationships with colleagues, but also in the circle of acquaintances and friends.

The issue of the “feigned” and strained relationship between a man and a woman is directly related to this problem. As in the two previous novels – “Stiller” and “Homo Faber” – the protagonist cannot figure out his women, however, as in these novels, he always has one among them for whom he has special feelings, but between them there is always some cold and insurmountable wall. One of the main components of this “wall” is his irresistible feeling of jealousy, which does not leave him even when his beloved woman is sincerely and selflessly devoted to him, which he does not doubt for a minute. He feels it “with every fiber of his soul”, understands it logically, but is unable to overcome this obsessive feeling psychologically. The blind man’s dark glasses help him “not to see” the smiles, the tender glances of others directed at his woman. This is one of the important factors why Enderlin, after much hesitation, nevertheless decided on the “role” of the blind Gantenbein.

Another reason for changing his own ego is the boredom that his entire environment, the entire society, induces in him. Enderlin-Gantenbein is a typical nonconformist who always lacks something, who cannot put up with everything that surrounds him, and, as in the case of the heroes of the other two novels, he resists in every possible way the role that this society “imposes” on him. The word “boredom” is “killer” for Enderlin, since it characterizes his present, and the future is even darker, since he associates it only with aging.

Thus, the “fundamental” change of his image, the change of place and “role” for Enderlin means nothing more than an attempt to “outwit” fate, “stop” it and turn its course

from its intended path. For the hero, this is an opportunity to radically change his life (the allusion to the German word *ändern* – to change, to alter – is already in his name). After all, according to Enderlin, “rebirth” into another person is an opportunity for new meetings, new, fresh feelings, and this in turn means “extending” youth, filling life with new meaning, new breath. On the other hand, this “metamorphosis” is also an opportunity to leave in the past and forget all the problems of the “past” life, to start a new life “from scratch”. This “reincarnation” of the main character, naturally, also presupposes a certain artistic game, which is present in almost all of M. Frisch’s prose works. In the novel “I Will Call Myself Gantenbein”, the game acquires a “multi-vector” character: the technique of interweaving real stories (most often taken from diary entries) with fictional ones applies not only to the main characters, but also to secondary characters. The narrative structure of these stories, as a rule, is centrifugal. The author builds the form of the narrative on the principle of “free” development, when he himself “does not know” where this or that line leads, and how it will end. Based on this, the author, or the person on whose behalf the story is told, can “turn” the course of events in a different direction, or, conversely, by the centripetal principle, return the course of events to the initial, “zero point”, and begin with the same character a different line of development of events, with a completely different “scenario”. That is, not only is the novel woven from separate patches of stories, each of these stories, in turn, has its own different “variations”.

The author prefaces each separate story or its “variation” with the expression “let us assume that...”. This style of narration is declared in the very title of the novel: the German “Mein Name sei Gantenbein” is literally more correctly translated as “Let us assume that my name is Gantenbein”. This style and this principle of narration are preserved until the end of the work.

Even being Enderlin, the hero, due to his job, must meet in a bar with a person whom he has not yet personally met. He only knows that his name is František Svoboda and that he is Czech by nationality. For some reason, Enderlin immediately draws a figure of a tall, broad-shouldered, blond man of middle age in his imagination. However, as it turns out later in the plot, this person cannot come to the appointed meeting at this time, since he is urgently sent to London. Instead, a young and charming woman comes and introduces herself as František Svoboda’s wife. She apologizes on behalf of her husband and tries to explain the circumstances of his absence. After a long, pleasant conversation, they decide to go to the opera together (an opportunity to “smooth out” the husband’s guilt). However, the situation changes: suddenly feeling that they have mutual sympathy for each other, they stay the night at her house. The next morning, having admitted to each other that it was just an “impulse”, they promise each other that they will forget about what happened, and nothing will remind them of it anymore (Frisch, 1991b, p. 258).

Here, according to the composition of the work, the behavioral variability of both characters comes into its own; for the author-narrator, “boundless spaces” for imagination open up. Elderlin “tries on” one role after another. The first of them: he wants to fly away from this city and forget about this meeting and this woman forever. He believes that this would be more correct and decent. At the same time, an inner voice tells him that this was not just a “business trip” romance, not some small “affair”, but rather deep feelings for this woman have awakened inside him. He decides to stay, and in his thoughts “scrolls” through possible scenarios that may follow from the decision he has made. Let us assume that everything is going seriously for him and Lilia (this is how the author “conditionally” calls Svoboda’s wife). That is, the story continues. But even here the composition of the novel does not acquire linearity: possible further “variations” dictate the multi-vector nature of the narrative. The author describes everything in such detail and plausibly that the reader often forgets that all this is happening in a “virtual” plane. And only sometimes, as if wishing to remind the reader that what is described is only a possible version of the development of events, the author-narrator inserts his constant into the text: let us assume that... The “role distribution” in the first version of the development of events is as follows: a certain time later, František Svoboda learns from his wife that she is in love with another. From here, in turn, two possible “sub-options” are “offered”: Svoboda, as a loving husband, decides not to make a scene and not to break the last thread connecting him with Lilya. He hopes that this is just a “light love affair” and if he gives his wife time to “come to her senses” and coolly weigh the pros and cons, then their union can most likely survive. Lilya will probably appreciate her husband’s nobility (a mask?) and, recalling the years they lived together, will come to the conclusion that “they do not look for good when good is good” and will stay with him.

The second “sub-option”: she nevertheless breaks up with her husband and connects her life with Enderlin. What are František Svoboda’s actions? Enderlin cannot choose a scenario for this man’s further actions: he cannot and does not want to get “into the skin” of this character. Then he imagines a picture of Svoboda, in a rage, crashing his car into a tree at full speed. In another option, he wants to forget and spends time in nightclubs and during “fits of jealousy” he breaks glasses there (Frisch, 1991b, p. 392). Then Enderlin finally decides to present himself in the role of Svoboda: let us assume that my name is Svoboda. And here we are clearly presented with the actions of Enderlin-Svoboda. This tall and broad-shouldered Czech takes an army rifle in his hands and begins to shoot at furniture, at crystal, at antique clocks, at everything that surrounds him (Frisch, 1991b, p. 424). However, Enderlin does not like this role at all, he cannot get used to it in any way, and therefore immediately abandons this “undertaking”. The “liberty” that the author-narrator allows himself can only be virtual,

fictitious, since in his soul he is deeply conservative, but fiction is as necessary to him as air, since only it saves the protagonist from “murderous” boredom.

The psychological aspect of this part of the novel, to a certain extent, indicates that Enderlin is frightened by either of these two endings: in the first case, when Lily stays with her husband, Enderlin is deprived of that one chance when he finally truly falls in love with a woman and is now losing her. In the second case, his fear has more trivial grounds: what if later, when life enters its usual rut and in the routine of everyday life it turns out that this was just a passion, and not the deep feeling for which he took it? Then everything will repeat itself as in the life from which he fled?

From this point on, the narrative abruptly changes its direction and returns to the “zero point”. The same characters, but according to a different scenario, when Enderlin has already renamed himself Gantenbein and taken on the “role” of a blind man. But Lilya has also changed her “role”, now she is a famous actress and leads a somewhat “social” lifestyle: she buys expensive dresses, often goes on tour. Being generally self-sufficient, both materially and psychologically, she, nevertheless, also puts on a kind of “blind” mask: she “does not see” that in her absence everything in the apartment has been tidied up, even the dishes have been washed, and her fines for the car have been paid. She pretends that it is not she who lives on his support, but he who lives at her expense, and never asks him what money he used to buy her these or those expensive outfits, despite the fact that she gives him only an insignificant amount for small everyday purposes. Maybe Lilya knows that Gantenbein is not blind and that he is only playing this role? Then we can conclude that she also “joins” this game, because this game is very convenient for her: there are no scenes of jealousy, no unnecessary conversations, no endless questions. Everyone has come to terms with their role, with their “mask”. The narrator, in the course of the plot, often leads the reader to the idea that this option is quite possible.

However, this “idyll” is broken by Gantenbein himself. His patience has run out, and he admits to Lilya that he is not blind, that all this time he has seen how after another tour there is a man next to her who does not hide his signs of attention to her (after all, he is sure that the blind Gantenbein does not see anything), and how some letters from Denmark appear on her desk, and much, much more.

After yet another showdown, when Gantenbein brings Lilya to tears, he asks her for forgiveness and for a certain time peace reigns in the house. They are happy together (Frisch, 1991b, p. 452). But the “laws of the genre” dictate their own. Such a trusting relationship develops between Gantenbein and Lilya that the latter, upon returning from a tour, confesses to Gantenbein that during the tour some impudent young man tried to court her. If we consider

that Gantenbein has already admitted that he is not blind and that he saw the telegrams that this young man sent her, we can understand that he is already on the verge of a breakdown, that his “sight” has only created new problems for him, once again making his life unbearable. And he himself in this status becomes completely unbearable for Lily and for those around him. The narration of this story, this “variant” of the development of events chosen by Gantenbein, reaches its apogee of tension when one morning a young man, whom Gantenbein takes for that young suitor, shows up at their home. After a scandal caused by Gantenbein, it turns out that this is a completely different young man, who came for a completely different matter. Gantenbein tries to smooth things over, but Lily declares that she is leaving him (Frisch, 1991b, p. 471).

Gantenbein “crosses out” this option as well: it is better to be “blind”. However, returning to the previous “role” in turn requires a change in the nature of the relationship with his immediate environment, primarily with Lilya. Let us assume that Lilya is already a scientist; she already has a completely different way of life, different values. But most of all, Gantenbein’s imagination “goes off the scale” when he imagines Lilya as an Italian countess who lives for her own pleasure and who will not allow anyone to raise their voice at her, for anyone to limit her freedoms. The Count (that is, Gantenbein) has to put up with all this. What will happen this time? Where will this line of narrative “break down” and what will be the next vector of development of events? Remaining true to his principle, M. Frisch leaves each of the stories unfinished for several reasons: firstly, in his opinion, the search for one’s own identity, one’s own “I” is an endless process; secondly, for the author, what is most important is not the result of the search, but the process itself, which involves constant movement, constant change of situations, so as not to allow life to become “swamped” under any circumstances; and, finally, the third reason, which we have already touched upon in the course of the analysis, is never to give “ready-made” answers to the questions raised. On the contrary, it is necessary to “connect” the reader to this process, make him experience all this and give his own answer, find the right line of development only for himself, and make his own personal choice. And this means virtually becoming a “co-author” of the work, and, to a certain extent, taking “part of the responsibility” upon himself. A person, according to M. Frisch, can never be completely satisfied with himself or with the world.

The search for self-identification is constantly associated in the Swiss author with a game of imagination, and the latter, in turn, not only allows, but also necessarily presupposes a game with everything and everyone: real and fictional, present and past (and sometimes future), personal and universal. The same principle is preserved in the story “Montauk” — the last of the prose works of this series, written in the same vein and including the same ideological

and compositional components — play, role, mask, interweaving of the real and the virtual (the last two works of the writer — the story “Man Appears in the Holocene Epoch” (1975) and the novel “Bluebeard” (1982) — are already close to classical genre examples). As one of the last works, which to a certain extent generalizes the creative path of M. Frisch, “Montauk” contains more diary material and more memories of different years. The words of Michel Montaigne, cited by the author as an epigraph, could successfully serve as an epigraph to all three previous novels of M. Frisch: “This is a sincere book, reader. From the very beginning, it warned you that I did not set myself any other goal in it than <...> private. ... The one I portray is myself. Here my shortcomings are presented as they are, and my natural being, as far as public decency allows...” (Frisch, 1991d, p. 97). These words, chosen by the author as an epigraph to his story, indicate that we are dealing with a “confession” in the first person.

M. Frisch's characteristic use of his diary entries has one specific feature in this story: the author even weaves memories of real events from different periods of his life into one common tangle in such a way that it is quite difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to “untangle” such a tangle. To do this, it is not enough to be well acquainted with all the author's diaries, but it is also necessary to know all his works well, since many fragments of different works, in which diary entries are equivalent to “building material” in constructing their plot, “grow” with new (real) details and important details that emerge in the writer's memory as he turns to them.

The elements of the compositional play of the work are obvious from the very first lines, which leave the impression of a fragmentary continuation of some text. The first pages end, and the reader cannot understand in any way on whose behalf the story is being told, who the characters are, when and where the action of the story takes place. Only one English word, written on a small sign, indicates that the action may take place in some English-speaking country. The process of the reader “unraveling” the author's intentions, his explicit and implicit allusions and hints, the specific time layer of this or that fragment of the story must continue until the end of the work; otherwise this “non-linearity” (if not to say chaos) of the narrative will not allow one to even slightly “put together” the overall picture of the plot. Unwinding the plot tangle, after a few pages we learn that the action (although everything described could rather be called inaction) takes place in the United States, on Long Island, in the small coastal town of Montauk. From the very beginning of the narrative, the main character of the story changes the chronotope in his thoughts and memories so often that only towards the end of the work do we manage to find out that everything happens during one day in May.

The structure of the story resembles a mosaic panel, consisting of small — often paragraph-sized — individual fragments, each of which may or may not have a connection

with the previous or subsequent fragment: only the subheadings of each of these fragments can indirectly suggest whether there is a connection with the next fragment. Thus, one of these fragments, entitled “my greatest fear is repetition”, is not connected in any way with the previous and subsequent fragments, but intertextually it clearly refers us primarily to the first novel “Stiller” (a student from Yale University asks him something about the heroes of this novel (Frisch, 1991d, p. 104)). In addition, the subtitle of this fragment itself reminds us of one of the main principles of the writer — fear of repetition. This fits in well with the flow of the narrative, since the author-narrator from the very beginning openly took on the role of a famous, venerable writer. But, as the author himself admits, “memories” often “hinder him” (Frisch, 1991d, p. 98). It is these memories that make him change his roles and masks throughout the story. For example, being well versed in art (and being an architect himself), in the story “Montauk”, as in the novel “Homo Faber” (during a joint trip with Zabeth), he puts on the “mask” of a person far from art: “... I run away from art and sit out the morning in the garden in the yard. It seems that art does not interest me ...” (Frisch, 1991d, p. 102). In general, the egocentric and withdrawn author-narrator in another fragment suddenly appears before the reader as a sensitive and compassionate person: “... a woman’s crying in the telephone receiver makes me helpless, completely helpless: it is impossible even to take the crying hand ...” (Frisch, 1991d, p. 103).

The theme of the success of a creative person in society is not new in the work of M. Frisch, but the theme of the success of a creative person with women is first particularly highlighted in the story “Montauk”. Moreover, the allusion to which the author resorts here is implicit. Having titled this fragment of the story “Goethe’s House”, M. Frisch leaves the ignorant reader in a foggy ignorance, since the latter cannot find a connection between the title of the fragment and its content. Only those who have thoroughly studied the biography of the “greatest German” or have been on a tour of Goethe’s “little house” will understand the essence of this implicit allusion: Goethe, who enjoyed great success with women, used to arrange his romantic dates in this little house. It is this idea, into which the author, as a subtle psychologist, latently puts a hint of his popularity, that is expressed by the protagonist of the story: “...if a man has achieved success, then <...> women ... simply uncontrollably envelop him with their charm.” The author/narrator manages to “free himself” from such “onset” only “on the street, in the crowd,” where he is “nameless” (Frisch, 1991d, p. 105).

Each time, indulging in his memories, M. Frisch analyzes not only real specific stories or situations that happened in his life, but also here, by analogy, “thinks up” virtual “variations” of their possible developments if he decided to act differently in one case or another. All this would seem to be intended to reflect the chaotic “influx” of individual “disparate” memories,

but in fact this is a deliberate, purposeful desire of the author to prevent the construction of a holistic picture, which in turn implies the introduction of a certain clarity in the resolution of a particular situation, a particular problem, which is unacceptable for the author.

In addition, the author-narrator does not want to stop this endless process of artistic play and therefore pretends that he cannot “assemble” the next “puzzle” and therefore “draws” the reader into this process, being confident that the latter will not be able to get out of the established “labyrinth”. “Trying on” the “mask” of the narrator or the main character, the reader is faced with the fact that with each such attempt, the “kaleidoscope” of the development of events opens up a completely new, unforeseen “configuration” before him. The technique of alternating narration from the first or third person, practiced by M. Frisch, according to the author, should contribute to a comprehensive, and therefore more impartial approach to the problem under consideration. In the story “Montauk”, in which, as noted, an attempt is made to summarize not only the creative path, but also the main milestones of life, the author for the first time frankly talks about women who occupied an important place in his life. He remembers Käthe, who later became the prototype of Hannah in the work “Homo Faber”, remembers his ex-wife Marianne, who gave him children. The author recalls with particular pain the Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann, whom he met in Italy: their life together was bright and stormy, but often overshadowed by their difficult relationship. M. Frisch often threw scenes of jealousy at her, which were later reflected in the novel “I Will Call Myself Gantenbein”. But their relationship was reflected more thoroughly in the story we are considering “Montauk”, which in this regard has a confessional character (it is no longer a role or a mask), but which was published after the tragic death of I. Bachmann in Rome, where she spent the last years of her life alone. That is why in a small fragment of the story, entitled “PRO MEMORIA” (IN MEMORY) M. Frisch plays with the word Rome, after which follows (again implicitly) a confession about “unspoken feelings” for I. Bachmann: “In Rome? “Oh, this pollution of the environment with feelings that no one needs – they have rotted because I never expressed them, or never expressed them honestly enough, never consciously made them public” (Frisch, 1991d, p. 106). The author blames himself for this and in the last part of the same fragment expresses this thought explicitly, but in his characteristic playful form: “The day before yesterday I dreamed that I was going to be executed next Wednesday, and I do not understand why next Wednesday I’m healthy <...>; there’s no way to protest” (Frisch, 1991d, p. 107).

All these memories, confessions, role-playing games with changing masks in one’s own imagination — this is the same constant search for oneself. In Max Frisch's works, masks and role-playing are key instruments for exploring identity. The author demonstrates that people often wear “masks” — that is, assume certain roles — in order to conform to societal

expectations and, on the other hand, to conceal their true emotions or to try to understand themselves through the lens of different “roles.” The core idea here is that identity is not static: a person constantly tries on various masks and roles in an effort to comprehend their own self and determine who they truly are.

Frisch’s point of departure is his conviction that human personality is something fluid and constructed. Masks and roles, in this view, serve on the one hand as a means of understanding the nature of our identity, and on the other, as a way to avoid interpersonal conflict — to “humanize” communication with the surrounding society by making use of this flexibility.

But “Montauk” is already with a retrospective, more impartial view when the author is one-on-one with his conscience. This is also facilitated by the place of action and the current situation: he is far across the ocean, where there are no familiar people, there are no conventions — only the American journalist Lynn accompanying him, who, although she knows about the fame of the writer, is not familiar with any of his works. Lynn in the story “Montauk” rather plays the role of a “mirror”; the author seems to be talking to himself, since the interlocutor (it would be more accurate to say “listener”) knows nothing about his personal life, about his path, about his work. For the author in this case, this is a “tabula rasa”, a find that gives him the opportunity here and now to conduct a thorough and extremely honest “revision” of himself, his conscience, and the path of his life.

This unique “final” dialogue of M. Frisch “with himself”, where confessions and repentances, crystallization of principles and values of life are mixed, is supported by intertextual “insertions” from all his novels (Frisch, 1991d, pp. 156, 157, 195), as if drawing a final line not only under his creative searches, but also in general under the search of the humanist author for the social role of man and his place in this world.

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